Legal
Services
Society

British Columbia
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News Release

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For Immediate Release:

Legal aid funding increase to help most vulnerable

Vancouver, BC — The $4.6 million increase in core government funding for legal aid announced today by Attorney General Geoff Plant will result in expanded services for family clients who are at most risk.

"This is a crucial service improvement," said LSS Executive Director Mark Benton. "It means we can move forward with programs that focus on helping family clients resolve their problems on their own, often without going to trial. And we can provide more help for some family clients who are at risk because they are in high conflict situations, by helping them find permanent resolutions to their legal problems."

The government also announced that a cost-sharing agreement between the federal and provincial governments will provide $1.7 million next year to fund immigration services to help eligible clients initiate refugee claims (the province's share is $800,000).

"We're very pleased that we can continue immigration services for another year," said Benton. "Refugees constitute the vast majority of these clients, and they are an especially vulnerable group. We consider providing services to them a high priority and hope that permanent funding will be found in the next year."

The new family program funding will cover continuing the current Provincial Court family duty counsel services, and developing three new programs:

- Extended family services for clients at greatest risk and whose issues cannot be resolved through mediation because of the high level of conflict involved;
- Limited Supreme Court family referrals for clients who have no alternative to litigating in Supreme Court, and
- Supreme Court family duty counsel services.

The increase is close to what the society had requested in its budget submission last November.

Benton said the society is reworking its budget on the basis of the new funding. Once the Board of Directors has a chance to consider a revised budget later this month, LSS will have more to announce about how and when it will roll out the new family programs.

For further information, see the attached backgrounder and/or contact:

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LSS is an independent, non-profit organization that has provided legal aid to people with low incomes in BC since 1979.

Legal representation is available for serious family issues (e.g,. involving child apprehension matters or domestic violence) and serious criminal problems. It is also available for some immigration, mental health law, and prison law matters.

Legal information is available through the province-wide toll-free LawLINE, plain language publications, and Internet services, including the Electronic Law Library, the Family Law in British Columbia, the LSS, and the LawLINK websites.

Legal advice is available through criminal duty counsel in all courts, the Brydges Line, and several pilot projects – including family duty counsel in provincial courts, and an enhanced LawLINE project that provides brief legal services to people with low incomes.